DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 978 52 IR 001 362

AUTHOR	Reed, Mary Jane; Schmidt, Susan K.
TITLE	Books By Mail: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults.
INSTITUTION	Morehead State Univ., Ky. Appalachian Adult Education Center.
SPONS AGENCY	Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Jun 74
GRANT	OEG-0-73-5341
NOTE	28p.; Library Service Guide Number 6
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.85 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; Catalogs; Delivery Systems; Disadvantaged Groups; *Library Circulation; Library Collections; Library Planning; Library Services; *Outreach Programs; Public Libraries
IDENTIFIERS	*Books By Mail Program

ABSTRACT

One of a series on library services to disadvantaged adults, this guide suggests several ways a library can provide books by mail services. Mail order delivery is a way of making the library's collection available to many who are unable or unwilling to visit the library building. The system can be handled by clerks or volunteers. Planning should include the library staff, the clientele to be served, the post office, and a catalog or some substitute method of contacting clients. The employment of many methods of publicity is necessary to research the client population. Program costs can range from $0.45 to $3.60 per book circulated. Four libraries with books by mail programs and 7 suggested background readings are listed. (PF)

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LIBRARY SERVICE GUIDES

Appalachian Adult Education Center

BOOKS BY MAIL SERVICES:

MOVING THE LIBRARY

TO DISADVANTAGED ADULTS

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APPALACHIAN ADULT EDUCATION CENTER

Public Library Training Institutes
Library Service Guide No. 6

BOOKS BY MAIL: MOVING THE LIBRARY TO DISADVANTAGED ADULTS

by

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Preface

This guide is one of a series on library services to disadvantaged adults. The purpose of the series is to explore alternative ways public libraries can expand services to this special group.

Each guide attempts to recognize the differences among public library budgets, staff size and training, and the differences among the communities libraries serve. Each guide deals with a particular service and, where possible, suggests several alternative ways the library can provide that service to disadvantaged adults. The library, then, can and should further adapt the suggestions to fit the resources and needs of its local community.

The guides combine (1) a thorough search of the library literature; (2) the knowledge of professional librarians, who wrote many of the guides and evaluated the entire series; and (3) the experience of the Appalachian Adult Education Center (AAEC) in designing interagency educational programs for disadvantaged adults.

The AAEC has worked with state, regional, and local public libraries in seven states in projects funded by the Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources of the U.S. Office of Education. In one project, four urban and three rural centers demonstrated ways public libraries and adult basic education programs could improve their services to disadvantaged adults by coordinating efforts in reader guidance, recruitment, library orientation, community referral, and in the selection, use, and delivery of materials. The AAEC also conducted institutes in local public libraries in seven states in designing and implementing library services for disadvantaged adults.

Work on those and other projects led to three conclusions, upon which the guides are based: (1) that undereducated adults need information and services to help solve problems; (2) that the public library can meet those needs through adjustments in procedures and interagency cooperation; and (3) that the materials and services required for disadvantaged adults are useful and useable to all adults.

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INTRODUCTION

Books by Mail Service: why, who, when, where, and how.

Why?

Many disadvantaged or undereducated adults never enter a public library because they do not have the time or the transportation to get there. Librarians who want to serve disadvantaged adults must be inventive in calling attention to the library's services and in offering the kinds of services that disadvantaged adults can use. Books by mail is one such service. Almost all disadvantaged adults receive postal service, so here is a ready-made everyday channel through which they can be reached and through which they can access a library. The Sears Roebuck catalog and procedures for ordering by mail are parts of many people's experience, so that mail order delivery of library materials is a service which builds on patterns that are already familiar to disadvantaged adults. Mail order delivery or books by mail (BBM) service is a way of making the library's collection available to many who are unable or unwilling to travel to or enter the library building itself. It brings materials to any mailbox in the area served.

Who?

Once a system has been set up, the mailing service is a highly routinized operation for the most part, and much

of it can be handled by the clerical staff or volunteers.

When?
Where?

Once established, the mailing service becomes a part of the daily library routines. With a reasonably steady demand, it is possible to absorb a light mailing load into the regular staff duties; but with a lively program and a sizable clientele, a separate collection, staff and area can be set up. At that point, the area should encompass the shelved mail order collection, staff work space, files, supplies and equipment.

How?

There are three major steps: (1) planning the BBM program; (2) publicizing the new service; and (3) implementing the BBM program in the library routine.

The following summarizes the three steps, to be detailed in the following pages.

Planning

To design the best program for the library and the community, decisions must be made about (a) defining the target audience who will use the new service; (b) the role of the post office; (c) whether or not to print and distribute a catalog; and (d) whether to have a separate BBM collection or to use the entire library collection.

Publicizing

The success of the program depends largely on making the public aware of it, but traditional methods of publicity like newspapers, articles, fliers, and mass mailings may not always reach disadvantaged adults. Other methods of publicity should be investigated; radio and television may play a significant role.

Implementing

Decisions must be made about (a) who on the staff will run the BBM program; (b) how requests will be taken—by mail, by telephone, or both; and (c) how those requests will be recorded—by author, title, or subject.

Once a useable system has been adopted it can become part of the normal routine in the library. When a request either by telephone or mail comes in, the library staff gathers the requested items and mails them to the patron. Enclosed in the book bag are return address labels and postage stamps, paper tape or string for reclosing the bag, another blank order card, and usually a small folder listing a few new titles. After reading the materials, the patron replaces them in the same mailer, attaches stamps, label, and tape, (and hopefully another order card), and mails the package back to the library. The materials are re-shelved and the new request filled.

PLANNING THE NEW SERVICE

The entire library staff should be involved in the planning stage. The library's board of trustees may want to be informed of the BBM service. They will want to know what the new service is, how it is important, and how much it will cost.

The librarian should emphasize to the board the benefits of the new service: increased circulation, good public relations, and reaching the disadvantaged and those who cannot come to the library. The board should receive progress reports from the librarian on the development of the new service.

It is at this early planning stage that the decisions discussed above should be made. Each library is aware of local constraints. Each situation varies. Some libraries have large budgets and can afford an elaborate BBM program. Some libraries have small budgets and can only afford a modest program. It should be stressed that there are flourishing BBM programs in public libraries in Floyd County, Kentucky, San Antonio, Texas, and Dodge City, Kansas without a printed catalog or a separate BBM collection.

The Clientele

An important part of planning is estimating the potential clientele. The postmaster can supply information on the

number of rural box holders on each route of the service area, and the number of in-town delivery boxes which would be reached through "Occupant" addresses. Get the area's census figures on income levels and education levels. This data should be available from the city or county government offices, or from the state library. These will give some feeling for the areas where most disadvantaged adults live and the number of persons to be reached. It is necessary to learn which routes will reach the highest percentage of the disadvantaged adult population that you wish to serve.

Post Office

Make arrangements with the local post office. The hearty cooperation of the postmaster and his staff is essential. Start out by consulting with him and letting him know the library staff wants to avoid causing unnecessary problems for him. He should be asked what paper work is necessary for a bulk mail permit if you are going to use catalogs and for use of the library rate for mailing materials. Describe the proposed service to get his enthusiastic approval. This relationship should be on-going. Communications should be kept open so that any postal service problems relating to the service will be brought to the library's attention and can be discussed before they become major irritants to postal employees. In this service pattern, the post office becomes an extension of the library: keep postal contacts interested and cooperative. Postal regulations are changeable, so the library should keep abreast.

Regulations

Set regulations for the program. Probably the chief rule should be that rules are minimal. Procedures and regulations should make it as easy and as simple as possible for the disadvantaged adult to use the service. For example, existing programs have shown fewer non-returned items than in over-the-desk circulation—therefore, the imposition of fines is both an unnecessary discouragement to the user and could cost more for the library to administer than the fines would total. A circulation period can be established by estimating the longest library-to-user-and-back delivery time and adding a generous reading period. Users respond well to postcard reminders that an item is overdue and other readers are waiting. The occasional book, which has been chewed beyond recovery by the baby or the puppy or tossed out accidentally with the trash, can be written off as an expense of the program.

BBM Catalog

No Catalog

A mail order catalog may not always be feasible. If the library does not have the funds or staff to produce a catalog, there are other ways of eliciting requests from patrons:

- The library staff can be familiar enough with its clientele to recommend materials.

- For part of the disadvantaged adult population in your service area, adult basic education (ABE) teachers can take requests and relay them to the library or a member of the library staff can visit ABE classes or adult learning centers and take requests.

- A bookmobile driver can take requests.

- Telephone requests are a good alternative and make up the bulk of requests taken in San Antonio and Dodge City. Whoever on the staff has this responsibility must be aware of how to handle telephone requests. Disadvantaged adults are often shy and may not be able to express their needs clearly. This may call for careful, patient questioning to help them translate their problems into information needs. An impatient or rude answer can scare away a prospective patron.

Printed BBM Catalog

If the library has the funds to publish a mail order catalog, this is an efficient way of letting patrons know what the library has to offer. The catalog can be an important link between the library and the patron.

The catalog does not have to be elaborate. Each library knows what it can afford to spend. Many libraries are experimenting with short "mini" catalogs.

First of all, arrangements must be made for the production of the catalog. Local newspapers, printing businesses, and local vocational-technical printing apprenticeship programs should be investigated for prices, quality of paper, and production schedules.

Many libraries use newsprint catalogs. The catalog should be designed to be distinguished from the usual commercial sales catalogs which many people toss out without reading. A picture on the front, possibly in color, will help, or a catchy slogan (examples: "A Library in Your Mailbox" or "Your Public Library Comes to You") or the library's name and picture, with an indication that the books listed inside are to be asked for, mailed, and read at no charge. If the area is covered by a number of local libraries, each should be listed—the back page is the usual spot—and patrons encouraged to visit or phone their closest library for additional materials not listed in the catalog.

Printed BBM Catalog

Titles should be roughly categorized within the catalog, to help the reader find the list of his favorites quickly. As a substitute for such standard categories as the Sears List, consider the AAEC's Life Coping Skills Categories and Subcategories. The categories used will depend on the assessment of the needs of the potential clientele. To this basic list you can add categories that are not in this list, such as Adventures and Suspense, Popular Fiction, Modern Classics, Magazines, Travel, Westerns, Historical Fiction, Nature, Sports, Science Fiction, Wit, Poetry, Arts and Crafts, LARGE PRINT BOOKS, TALKING BOOKS (this section may simply refer the patron to the regional library for the blind service), Mysteries, Gothic Romance, Cassettes, Films. . . .

The pages of the catalog should be sprinkled with illustrations of book jackets to break up the monotony of printed titles. A brief annotation should accompany each title—one, two, or three sentences—to give the reader some basis for choosing.

The catalog can be produced from camera-ready copy set up in the library, by typesetting, by mimeographing (include line drawings, some relief from the printed list), or whatever method is

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feasible and attractive. Annotations should be written by the person in charge of selection of books for the mail service. Establish patterns of publication and distribution. Experience shows that a patron will work through the books he wants from a catalog of 500 titles within about three months; if only one catalog is mailed, there will be a surge of orders during the first few weeks and thereafter orders will taper off. In order to keep a steady flow of mail order service (for the good of the library staff as well as maximum service to patrons), additional mailings should be made. The mailing area can be divided into fairly equal segments by route numbers, and the same catalog can be mailed to each segment at planned intervals. After the first catalog (perhaps of 300 to 400 titles) has been in patrons' hands on a given route for three months, another and different catalog containing the same number of titles should be mailed to that route. Thus, over a period of a year, four or more different catalogs will have been printed and each of these may be distributed for a year or more to the various routes. A schedule of publishing catalogs should be developed so that this effort is spread throughout the year. A regular flow of catalogs to patrons is important in keeping the work load even and usage at a good level. It has even been demonstrated that a mailing of the

same catalog to the same postal routes after a year or so will result in a surge of response similar to that when any new catalog is distributed. These surges can be evened out by steady distribution of several catalogs.

In addition to the major catalogs, mimeographed fliers listing new titles can be included in each mailing of requested books, so that active users have additional choices. Some mailing service staff people feel that the potential demand level is almost unlimited, that proper catalog production and distribution techniques will build circulation almost indefinitely.

Separate Collection

Decide whether or not to establish a mail order collection separate from the library's regular collection. If the collection or the number of disadvantaged who will be using the mail order service is small, a separate collection may not be useful. The library may not have the funds to buy books or maintain a separate collection only for mail order use. San Antonio Public Library in San Antonio, Texas, Dodge City Public Library, Dodge City Kansas, and the Floyd County ABE Public Library Center, Prestonsburg, Kentucky, have flourishing BBM programs without separate collections. These programs use their entire in-house collection as their BBM collection.

If the library has the money and facilities, a separate collection for mail order service is an alternative. These titles should be mostly in paperbacks, to save on mailing costs and the costs of wear-and-tear. They should be in multiple copies—usually 3 to 10 will serve to prevent long lists of reserves. This collection can be processed and shelved by accession number (as listed in the published catalog) with only a title card file for looking up requests which arrive without the item's identification number. As a collection housed separately in numerical order in the mail order area, these materials can be accessed more efficiently by the mail service staff. Requested items which are not in this collection can, of course, be supplied from the library's regular collection or by interlibrary loan; similar special treatment will be given to any subject requests which come to the mail order section.

Kinds of materials. Materials for a separate BBM Collection could include books (paperbacks or hardbacks), pamphlets, magazines, large print books, pattern books for sewing, photocopies of patterns, knitting instruction books, easy-reading books, and some juvenile titles as well as children's books for parents to read aloud to their children. Some libraries even mail out audiovisual aides. The program is limited only by the

Separate Collection	staff's ingenuity. By starting with types of materials that are likely to elicit requests, other types of materials can be added later. *Titles or subject areas to make up collection.* Judging from the experience of existing mail order services, the collection should include recreational reading, coping skill how-to-do-it materials, and whatever of the more serious and informational titles the library's users will want. Studies indicate that choices of reading by mail delivery seems to follow the same use patterns as reading by walk-in patrons. But remember that most disadvantaged adults will need easy-to-read materials. *Size of collection.* The number of unique titles in the collection should be sufficient to supply the expected number of readers at an estimated average number of books read per user per month, with allowance for wide variation of reader interests.	014	

PUBLICIZING THE NEW SERVICE

013	The proper public relations or publicity can make or break any BBM program. Many methods of publicity will have to be explored and should include using the media.
Newspapers	The local newspaper should be willing to use news releases in advance of the new program. In some communities there is a public library column in the local newspaper. Some local newspapers may be willing to publish a printed insert in each newspaper. The insert should be attractive, should indicate what the new service is, and when it will begin.
Advance Mailing	Consider an advance mailing of a single folded sheet saying something like: WATCH FOR NOTIFICATION OF A NEW SERVICE FROM YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY: MAIL ORDER DELIVERY OF BOOKS. Such a mailing does not have to be fancy or expensive. This could be sent to box holders ahead of a catalog; or if a catalog is not being sent, the flier could explain the new service, how to use it, and could mention titles or subject areas that might be of interest to that community.
Fliers	Brief fliers publicizing the BBM program can be left in places where disadvantaged adults are apt to go. Such places include churches, grocery stores, doctors' offices, waiting rooms, bus depots,

	banks, adult learning centers, adult education classes and the community agencies that serve disadvantaged adults. They could be given to children in school to take home or put on the bookmobile. The message should tell what BBM is and how to use it.		
Posters	Posters telling about the new service can be displayed in the library, out of the library, in store fronts and on community bulletin boards. Posters can also be placed in many of the same places where fliers would be passed out. The message could be the same as that on a flier.		
Radio and Television	Because printed announcements will reach only a small number of disadvantaged adults, the media should be used also. All commercial radio and television stations are required to allow free time for public service announcements. The educational station may also set aside free time for similar announcements. Cable television stations very often list what is going on in the community. This is a good place to publicize the new program.		
Word of Mouth	Simple word of mouth praise is often the single most important public relations device the library can have. Satisfied customers will tell their friends and family. A good program is its own best publicity.		

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW SERVICE

Implementing the new service means making it part of the daily library routine. The mechanics are: ordering, processing, weeding, establishing staff routines, acquiring supplies and equipment, if necessary, and assigning staff members to specific tasks, and filling BBM orders.

Ordering

The library should not limit the number of items per order, since there is no way to know whether the order is for one or for several persons in a household.

Procedures can follow those of the regular collection. Whether to merge with the regular order department or set up a separate operation is a local decision. The separate operation is perhaps preferable, as the problems in ordering paperbacks differ from hardback editions. There are vendors who deal primarily in paperbacks; some will offer sizable discounts in return for large annual orders. Some will include annotations in the purchase price.

Processing

Cataloging is not necessary in this operation. The books will be listed in the mail order catalog by identification number, and should be shelved sequentially by this number. You will need some record for orders which come in without the number (probably a card file of titles is most useful) and perhaps a typed list by

I.D. number for inventory and weeding. Keep files to a minimum.

Weeding

Some time after all copies of a catalog have been distributed (perhaps six months), the books listed therein and not listed in a subsequent catalog can be considered for discard. Factors to be considered: condition, circulation record, probable future demand. Some books may be transferred to the regular collection while others may be discarded. The mail order collection should be selected and weeded with an eye to maintaining as high a circulation per title as possible, to keep cost per circulation low.

Staff Routines

Daily tasks include:

- opening mail
- sorting orders
- shelving returned items
- filling orders from shelves
- packaging orders
- taking packages to post office
- selection

Less frequent tasks are:

- ordering
- receiving
- processing
- catalog preparation
- catalog mailing
- keeping and analyzing statistics

Supplies

In addition to ordinary library office supplies, the BBM program requires the following:

Mailers should be heavy brown envelopes in assorted sizes. Padding is not necessary; in fact, there is some indication that it shortens the life of the mailer. Do not use bags with pull-tabs for opening; these are not easily re-used. A good mailer will make from three to ten round-trips from the library. Fasten with staples for sending, enclose paper tape or string for the return. Open so as not to damage the mailer.

Glassene envelopes for return postage stamps, to be enclosed with the book.

Order cards

	Mimeograph stencils and **paper** for producing the fliers to mail with orders. **Labels** for sending. **Addressed** labels for return from sender. **Paper tape** or **string** for borrowers to use to reclose mailers in returning books. **Forms** for collecting desired statistics. Materials for catalog preparation. Postage stamps or postage meters.		1. **A typist** is needed for ordering, preparation of the catalog, typing correspondence, forms, etc. 2. The number of **mailing clerks** will depend upon the size of the operation. These people will perform all tasks except those specifically delegated to the supervisor and typist. 3. The **supervisor** of the working group might also select and order books, write annotations, and prepare copy for the catalogs. This is probably not a full-time job except for a large operation using a catalog and a separate collection. 4. **Volunteers** should be considered as an alternative.
Equipment	A **scale** for weighing packages, preferably marked with postal rates. **Stapler and staples** for fastening packages shut. **Shelves** for the collection. **Work tables** for incoming and outgoing mail. **Book trucks** for shelving returns and assembling outgoing orders.	**Filling a BBM Order**	1. As the request comes in, whether as a mail or telephone request, an address label for the package is prepared. 2. The appropriate item is found (or a substitute made if it isn't in), checked out, and placed in a mailer. 3. Along with the materials are packed stamps, return address label, string or tape for reclosing the mailer, and new order cards. A list of other titles might also be included.
Staff	The size of staff will depend upon the scope of the program.		

	4. The packages are stapled shut. 5. The packages are taken to the post office to go out in the afternoon mail.	020	

COSTS

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An American Library Association-sponsored Conference on Books by Mail Service explored the cost of a books by mail program. Ten libraries in both urban and rural areas with books by mail service gave cost figures which ranged for unit cost per book circulated from 45 cents to $3.60. The median cost per book circulated was 67 cents.

A percentage breakdown of the total costs was discovered to be about:*

Salaries and Wages	30%
Separate Books by Mail Collection	24%
Books by Mail Catalog	18%
Postage	12%
Supplies and Advertising	16%
	100%

At the ABE-Library Project, Floyd County School System, Prestonsburg, Kentucky 41653, the entire BBM budget for FY 1972-1973 was $1,250.

At the Dodge City Public Library, Dodge City, Kansas, the only expenses are postage and "Jiffy" mailers which cost about $50 for 500 and can be reused 10 times.

*Kim, Choong H. and Sexton, Irwin M. *Conference on Books by Mail Service, A Report.* Terre Haute, Indiana: Department of Library Science, Indiana University, September, 1973.

WHAT OTHER LIBRARIES HAVE DONE

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The following libraries operate successful BBM programs.

- Dodge City Public Library
  Dodge City, Kansas

  This flourishing BBM program was set up in two weeks. It operates without a catalog or separate collection. Requests are processed and mailed out within 24 [illegible] of a telephone request.

- Floyd County ABE-Library Project
  Prestonsburg, Kentucky

  This small rural library operates a successful books by mail service for disadvantaged adults. There is no catalog nor special collection. Requests from adult basic education (ABE) students are taken by the bookmobile librarian as he visits the various ABE classes in Floyd County. About two requests per day were mailed out.

- Mailibrary
  Books by Mail in Mississippi

This BBM program served nine libraries involving twenty-two counties. This program used a catalog printed by the American Paperback Company which was the supplier for the BBM collection.

- San Antonio Public Library
  San Antonio, Texas

  This urban library operates a successful books by mail service without a special separate collection or elaborate book catalog. A brief non-annotated new acquisitions list suffices. This library felt that cost is too expensive and a catalog must be continually updated. Circulating 100 books a day, the cost of circulation per book was under 20 cents.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

The following items are useful background readings:

Hu. Teh-wei, Booms. Bernard H., Haltreider. D. Lynne. *A Benefit Cost Analysis of Alternative Library Delivery Systems.* Greenwood Press. 51 Riverside Ave., Westport, CT 06880. In Print.

Kelly, Alice. "Mailbox Library." *American Libraries.* 3:647-8. June, 1972.

Kim, Choong H. and Sexton, Irwin M. "Books by Mail, Sleeper of the '70's?" *Wilson Library Bulletin.* 47:733-8, May, 1973.

Knott, William A. *Books by Mail, A Guide for the Librarian to Establishing the Service.* Published by Jefferson County Public Library, Golden Colorado, 1974, 40 pp.

Report of Las Vegas Books by Mail Conference, June 23, 1973, is available free from Department of Library Science, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809, 31 pp.

Reynolds, Maryan E., Reed, Mary Jane Pobst, and Vrooman, Hugh T. *Study for the Design of an Optimum System for Mail Order Book Delivery Service in the State of Washington.* Final Report to the U.S. Office of Education, OEG-0-74-0536, June, 1974.

San Antonio Public L.. -ry, Texas. *Books by Mail: An Experimental Project.* Sponsored by the Council on Library Resources, The Library, 1970.

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LIBRARY SERVICE GUIDES

1. Materials Selection for Disadvantaged Adults
2. Assessing Community Information and Service Needs
3. Using Pamphlets with Disadvantaged Adults
4. Deposit Collections of Special Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
5. Utilizing Volunteers in Expanding Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
6. Books By Mail Services: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults
7. Evening and Weekend Library Services for Disadvantaged Adults
8. The Library as a Community Information and Referral Center
9. Planning the Expansion of Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
10. Working with Library Trustees to Expand Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
11. Reader Guidance Services for Disadvantaged Adults
12. The Recruitment of Disadvantaged Adults: Effective Publicity
13. Conducting Tours to the Library for Groups of Disadvantaged Adults
14. ABE—What Is It?
15. The Relationship of Disadvantagement to Library Services
16. In-service Training of Personnel to Serve Disadvantaged Adults
17. Adult Education in the Library: ABE, GED, CLEP, and the Open University
18. Book Talks: Encouraging Library Materials Usage by Disadvantaged Adults
19. Techniques for Teachers: Teaching the Application of Basic Skills to Everyday Life Problems
20. Displaying Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
21. Bookmobile Services: Moving the Library to Disadvantaged Adults
22. Expanding Library Services to the Elderly
23. Using Audiovisuals With Disadvantaged Adults
24. Expanding Library Services to the Institutionalized
25. Interagency Cooperation: The Public Library and Agencies that Serve Disadvantaged Adults
26. Adjusting School Libraries for Use by Disadvantaged Adults
27. Speakers Bureaus for Disadvantaged Adults
28. Maintaining Separate Collections of Library Materials for Disadvantaged Adults
29. Client Participation in Expanding Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults
30. The Role of the College Library in the Education of Disadvantaged Adults
31. Public Library Services to Young Disadvantaged Adults
32. Working with Elected Officials to Expand Library Services to Disadvantaged Adults

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The work presented in this document was performed pursuant to a grant from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Libraries and Learning Resources [OEG-0-73-5341]. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U. S. Office of Education, but are the sole responsibility of the Appalachian Adult Education Center.